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ABSTRACT

The 1998 Head Start Act mandated that 50 percent of all Head Start teachers nationwide have a minimum of an associate degree in early childhood education or a related field by September 2003 and that each classroom in center-based programs without such degreed teachers have a teacher with a Child Development Associate credential or equivalent state certificate. In preparation for the 2003 reauthorization of Head Start, a study examined: the extent to which Head Start met legislative mandates, whether Head Start teacher salaries increased and enabled grantees to attract and retain degreed teachers, and the extent to which degree and other programs in early childhood education are available for Head Start teachers. Results indicated that Head Start met the requirements for teacher qualifications by increasing the number of teachers with at least an associate degree in early childhood education or a related field to 52 percent. The number of classrooms that did not have at least one teacher with minimum credentials was not known. Respondents noted that quality improvement funds used to pay for teacher training and increase salaries were key to success. Agreements worked out with colleges to provide easily accessible early childhood education courses were also considered important in this effort. (SM)

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United States General Accounting Office
Report to Congressional Requesters

GAO

October 2003

ED 482 831

HEAD START

Increased Percentage of Teachers Nationwide Have Required Degrees, but Better Information on Classroom Teachers' Qualifications Needed

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-04-5, a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The 1998 Head Start Act mandated that 50 percent of all Head Start teachers nationwide have a minimum of an associate degree in early childhood education, or, in a related field with preschool teaching experience, by September 30, 2003. This law also required that each classroom in center-based programs (those that primarily provide services in classroom settings) without such a degreed teacher have a teacher with a Child Development Associate credential or an equivalent state certificate. In preparation for the reauthorization of Head Start in fiscal year 2003, GAO was asked to examine: (1) the extent to which Head Start has met legislative mandates concerning teacher qualifications; (2) whether Head Start teachers' salaries have increased and enabled grantees to attract and retain teachers with degrees; and (3) the extent to which degree and other programs in early childhood education are available for Head Start teachers and if grantees have taken steps to enhance access to them.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Health and Human Services require that ACF, at least annually, collect data from Head Start grantees and report to the Secretary on whether each classroom in Head Start centers has at least one teacher with at least the minimum credentials required by law.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-5.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Marnie Shaul at (202) 512-7215 or shaulm@gao.gov.

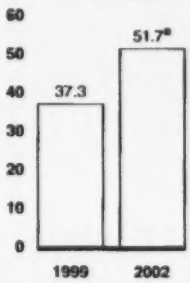
HEAD START

Increased Percentage of Teachers Nationwide Have Required Degrees, but Better Information on Classroom Teachers' Qualifications Needed

What GAO Found

Head Start appears to meet the 1998 mandate because about 52 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide had, at a minimum, an associate degree in early childhood education or in a related field based on Administration for Children and Families (ACF) 2002 data. This represented more than a 4-percentage point increase in teachers with such degrees since 1999.

Head Start Teachers with Degrees Increased Significantly between 1999 and 2002



Source: GAO analysis of ACF data. (These data are self-reported by grantees.)

Note: Head Start data on the percent of teachers with degrees were collected somewhat differently in 1998, limiting their comparability with data collected in subsequent years.

*The percentage of teachers with degrees in 2002 includes 3.8 percent with graduate degrees, 24.8 percent with bachelor's degrees, and 23 percent with associate degrees. (Does not add to 51.7 percent due to rounding.)

Although ACF requested grantees to report both the numbers of teachers by type of degree or credential, and the numbers of classrooms, it is not possible to determine if there was a teacher with the credentials required by law in each classroom in Head Start centers since ACF did not ask grantees to report this specific information. Furthermore, the ACF monitoring instrument used did not have a separate question that asked whether each classroom had at least one teacher with at least minimum credentials.

Quality improvement funds, which have declined sharply in recent years, enabled Head Start to increase teacher salaries to levels comparable to other preschool teachers during the 1999-2001 period, although they remained at about half of what kindergarten teachers earned nationally. Some Head Start grantees continue to identify difficulties in competing for teachers with degrees with existing salaries.

Early childhood education and similar programs were available in all states and in one in five postsecondary institutions. However, as expected, the more rural, less populous states had few of these programs. Head Start grantees used a number of methods to make early childhood education accessible to their teachers, such as offering on-site classes, but access to these programs in rural areas sometimes was a problem.

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Abbreviations

ACF	Administration for Children and Families
BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics
CDA	Child Development Associate
FACES	Family and Child Experiences Survey
HHS	Department of Health and Human Service
IPEDS	Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System
PIR	Program Information Report
PRISM	Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring

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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

October 1, 2003

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate

The Honorable Christopher J. Dodd
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Children and Families
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
House of Representatives

The Honorable Dale E. Kildee
House of Representatives

In fiscal year 2002, Head Start provided comprehensive child development services to over 900,000 preschool children from low-income families, and the program was funded by a federal appropriation of about $6.5 billion. Over 1,500 grantees, including community action agencies, school systems, for-profit and nonprofit organizations, other government agencies and tribal consortia, provide Head Start program services either directly or through delegate agencies. Classroom instruction provided by over 51,000 teachers in about 47,000 classrooms is a key element of the Head Start program. In 1998, the Congress sought to raise the educational level of these teachers by mandating that 50 percent of all Head Start classroom teachers in Head Start centers have a minimum of an associate degree in early childhood education, or in a related field with preschool teaching experience, by September 30, 2003. This amendment also required that each classroom without such a degreed teacher have a teacher with a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or a state certificate

equivalent to a CDA. Some research indicates that preschool teachers with higher levels of education are more effective at teaching young children.[1]

In light of the reauthorization of Head Start in fiscal year 2003 you asked us to examine: (1) the extent to which Head Start has met legislative mandates concerning teacher qualifications; (2) whether Head Start teacher salaries have increased and enabled grantees to attract and retain teachers with degrees; and (3) the extent to which degree and other programs in early childhood education are available for Head Start teachers and if grantees have taken steps to enhance access to them.

To respond to these questions we analyzed U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's (HHS) data on Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Specifically, we analyzed HHS's Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Program Information Report (PIR) data on teacher credentials and salaries for 1998-2002. ACF collects these data each year from Head Start and Early Head Start grantees. Our analysis revealed some inconsistencies in these data similar to those identified by HHS's Office of Inspector General in its draft report on teacher qualifications covering program year 2000-2001, which was based largely on data from the PIR. We calculated the percent of teachers with degrees based on the largest number of total teachers reported in the PIR, rather than on the number of teachers reported by educational level, which was smaller. In addition, to confirm the reasonableness of these data, we also reviewed 1998 and 2000 data relating to teacher qualifications from another source—ACF's Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES). During our review, we also interviewed officials from each of the 10 ACF regional offices and the American Indian-Alaska Native and Migrant Branches and obtained information from 30 Head Start grantees from all 10 geographic regions to learn about efforts to increase the proportion of teachers with degrees. We selected grantees in each region to obtain perspective on those that had been successful in achieving a high proportion of teachers with degrees and those that were having difficulty doing so. We visited 11 of these grantees in 2 ACF regions. These grantees were in three states—Delaware, Maryland, and Texas—and in the District of Columbia. Furthermore, we compared average annual salaries of Head Start teachers taken from program data with annual salaries of preschool and kindergarten teachers

[1]See, for example, National Research Council (2001) *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers*. Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy. Barbara T. Bowman, M. Suzanne Donavan, and M. Susan Burns, editors. Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

as calculated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). ACF PIR data reported by grantees included the average Head Start full-time teacher salaries earned annually, regardless of the number of months worked during the year. Salaries reported by the BLS for preschool and kindergarten teachers were estimated average annual wages, based on employer responses to a BLS survey. BLS does not distinguish between full- and part-time workers and assumes that all work 2,080 hours annually (which is a 40 hour work week for 1 year). Finally, we analyzed the U.S. Department of Education data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to determine the number of schools offering programs in early childhood education and similar fields for years 1998-2000 and the number of programs completed by students in those areas of study for the same time period. While we took steps to determine that the PIR data were sufficiently reliable for this report, we did not independently verify the data provided by the grantees. We conducted our work between February and September 2003 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Appendix I provides more details on our scope and methodology.

Results in Brief

On the basis of ACF data, Head Start appeared to meet the 1998 mandate requiring at least 50 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide to have, at a minimum, an associate degree by September 30, 2003, but it is not known if all classrooms in Head Start centers had at least one teacher with at least the minimum credentials required by statute. About 52 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide had at least an associate degree in early childhood education or a related field at the end of the 2002 program year, according to grantee-reported data. This was an increase of more than 14 percentage points in teachers with degrees since 1999. All ACF regions and the American Indian-Alaska Native and Migrant branch programs made some progress increasing the percent of teachers with degrees over the 1999-2002 period, although there was considerable variation among regions and branches in the level of teachers with degrees in 2002. We could not determine if each classroom had at least one teacher with the credentials required by law because grantee-reported data did not explicitly include this type of information. Although ACF requested grantees to report both the number of teachers holding either degrees in early childhood education or related fields, or CDA or equivalent credentials, and the number of classrooms, it is not possible to determine from these data if there was at least one teacher with at least minimum credentials in each classroom. In addition, ACF did not ask grantees to report specifically on this. Furthermore, although ACF monitors about one-third of Head Start grantees each year, the monitoring instrument

used did not have a separate question that asked whether each classroom had at least one teacher with at least minimum credentials.

Head Start teachers' salaries have increased since 1998, but some Head Start grantees identified difficulties in competing for teachers with degrees. Quality improvement funds enabled Head Start to increase teacher salaries to levels comparable to other preschool teachers during the 1999-2001 period, although they remained at about half of what kindergarten teachers earned nationally. However, quality improvement funds have declined sharply in recent years, when Head Start's appropriation grew more slowly than in the previous years. While all types of grantees paid more to staff with higher qualifications, both the average qualifications of teachers and the salaries paid them varied across types of grantees, with teachers in Head Start programs administered by school systems on average earning the highest salaries and having the highest levels of education. Turnover was also lower at grantees administered by school systems and government agencies than among the 78 percent of Head Start teachers who worked at Head Start programs administered by other types of agencies. Although nationally students completed 34,000 individual programs in early childhood education or related fields in the 1999-2000 school year, many grantees reported difficulties competing for degreed graduates in these fields with existing salaries. Data were not available on the number of students completing early childhood education programs that actually worked as preschool teachers in Head Start or similar programs.

Programs in early childhood education and 8 similar fields of study were available in all states and in one in five postsecondary institutions included in 1999-2000 Department of Education data. However, as expected, the more rural, less populous states had few of these programs. Head Start grantees used a number of methods to make early childhood education and similar courses accessible to their teachers, such as offering on-site classes. However, providing opportunities in rural areas sometimes was a problem. Despite efforts to use distance education—education characterized by the separation, in time or place, between instructor and student—some Head Start teachers had to travel considerable distances to attend classes.

Because ACF did not collect the necessary data to determine whether each classroom in Head Start centers had at least one teacher with the qualifications required by law, we are recommending that the Secretary of HHS require that ACF, at least annually, collect data on whether there is at

least one teacher with at least the minimum required credentials in each classroom.

Background

Head Start began as an 8-week summer project administered by the former Office of Economic Opportunity in 1965. Designed to help break the cycle of poverty, Head Start provided preschool children of low-income families with comprehensive educational, social, health, nutritional, and psychological services. Head Start was originally aimed at 3 to 5 year olds. A companion program begun in 1994, Early Head Start, made these services available to children from birth to 3 years of age as well as to pregnant women.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs are administered by ACF. Through its 10 regional offices and 2 branches—the American Indian-Alaska Native Branch and the Migrant Branch—ACF directly funds more than 1,500 grantees that provide Head Start program services either directly or through delegate agencies. Grantees include community action agencies, school systems, for-profit and nonprofit organizations, other government agencies, and tribal consortia. In fiscal year 2002, these grantees served more than 912,000 children, with about 850,000 in Head Start and 62,000 in Early Head Start. More than 90 percent of Head Start children are enrolled in center-based programs while most of the remaining children attend home-based programs.[2] Head Start is funded primarily by federal grants, but grantees must provide at least 20 percent of the program funding, which can include in-kind contributions, such as facilities for holding classes. Program costs, which include teacher salaries, vary considerably since some grantees may receive donations, such as low-cost space. Grantees may also have widely varying costs of personnel and space depending on many factors, such as geographic location (urban or rural), and type of sponsoring agency (school system or private nonprofit). However, salaries generally comprise most of Head Start grantees' budgets, and grantees' teacher salary levels differ based on factors such as location and staff qualifications.

Head Start classrooms are required to be staffed by a teacher and an assistant teacher or an aide, or by two teachers. In fiscal year 2002, Head

[2]Center-based programs are those where services are provided to children primarily in classroom settings. Throughout this report, we refer to classrooms in center-based programs as "classrooms." Head Start also has "home-based programs" that provide services in the private residences of children being served.

Start had more than 51,000 teachers and a similar number of assistant teachers. At least one teacher in each classroom in Head Start centers must have either: (1) an associate, baccalaureate (bachelor's), or advanced (graduate) degree in early childhood education; (2) such a degree in a related field, with preschool teaching experience; (3) a CDA credential appropriate to the age of children served in center-based programs; or (4) a state certificate at least equivalent to a CDA. The CDA credential requires a high school diploma or equivalent and, within the previous 5 years, 480 hours working with preschool children in a group setting and 120 hours of child care education. The CDA credential is awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition of Washington D.C. Teachers with CDA credentials are expected to be able to meet the specific needs of children and work with parents and other adults to nurture children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth in a child development framework.

In addition to the minimum requirements for teacher qualifications, the 1998 Head Start Act required that 50 percent of Head Start teachers across the nation have a minimum of an associate degree in early childhood education or in a related field with preschool teaching experience by September 30, 2003. Head Start reauthorization proposals have been introduced that would require increased levels of teachers with associate and bachelor's degrees.

Some research indicates that preschool teachers with higher levels of education are more effective at teaching young children. For example, the National Institute for Early Education Research reported in March 2003 that the education levels of preschool teachers and specialized training in early childhood education predict teaching quality and children's learning and development progress.[3] In addition, the National Research Council reported in 2000 that while any teacher education related to early childhood development or education is better than none, teachers with bachelor's (or higher) degrees in early childhood development appear to be most effective.[4]

[3]Barnett, W.S. (2003). Better Teachers, Better Preschools: Student Achievement Linked to Teacher Qualifications. Preschool Policy Matter. 2. New Brunswick, NJ:NIEER.

[4]National Research Council (2001) *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers.* Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy. Barbara T. Bowman, M. Suzanne Donavan, and M. Susan Burns, editors. Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

The Head Start appropriation has increased from $4.66 billion in fiscal year 1999, the first year of the current authorization, to about $6.67 billion in fiscal year 2003. The Head Start Act provides that a portion of the appropriation be committed to quality improvement if there is a real increase (one exceeding the rate of inflation) over the previous year's appropriation. Grantees must use at least one-half of their quality improvement funding to increase the salaries of classroom teachers and other staff. The remaining funds are to be used for such activities as training to improve staff qualifications. In the first 2 years of the current authorization, fiscal years 1999-2000, ACF allocated part of the quality improvement funds to address Congress's emphasis on increasing the number of teachers with degrees. Grantees were allocated $1,300 for each teacher who did not have either a college degree in early childhood education or a degree in a related field with a state certificate, and $300 for each teacher with such a degree. According to ACF officials, each year's quality improvement funding was added to the next year's base grant in order to sustain the efforts supported by these funds, such as teacher salary increases. ACF regional offices did not consistently document how these funds were used, though they noted that they monitored changes in staff qualifications.

Head Start funding provided grantees with two other sources of support for improving teacher qualifications—quality improvement centers and Head Start collaboration offices in each state. Quality improvement centers, funded at about $41 million in fiscal year 2002, provided technical assistance and training in support of various national initiatives, including the improvement of teacher qualifications. There were 16 quality improvement centers nationally, with at least 1 in each ACF region and 1 each for the Migrant and American Indian-Alaska Native programs, until funding for quality improvement centers was terminated on August 31, 2003,and these centers ceased to operate. Head Start collaboration offices in each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Migrant and American Indian-Alaska Native programs, promote coordination of Head Start and state and local programs for young children and their families. Some state collaboration offices received grants from ACF to develop and enhance professional development opportunities. State collaboration offices were funded at approximately $8 million in fiscal year 2003.

ACF monitors and oversees Head Start grantees. ACF collects data on Head Start programs through the PIR, an annual survey of grantees. These data include information on various aspects of grantees' programs, such as numbers of teachers with degrees in early childhood education. In addition, to ensure that Head Start grantees comply with Head Start

program performance standards governing teacher qualifications and other matters, ACF's regional offices and branches monitor each grantee at least once every 3 years. ACF uses the Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring (PRISM) to conduct these reviews.

The Percent of Teachers with Degrees Has Risen and Appears to Meet Legislated Goals for Progress, but It Is Unknown Whether Each Classroom Has a Teacher with at Least Minimum Credentials

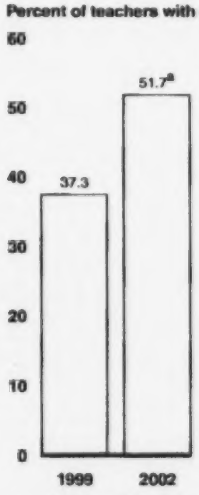
Head Start appears to have met the 1998 mandate requiring at least 50 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide in classrooms in Head Start centers to have degrees by September 30, 2003, based on grantee-reported data, but it is not known if all classrooms in Head Start centers had at least one teacher with at least minimum credentials. Fifty-two percent of Head Start teachers nationwide had at least an associate degree in early childhood education or a related field at the end of the 2002 program year. All regions made some progress increasing the percent of teachers with degrees over the 1999-2002 period, although there was considerable variation among regions in the level of teachers with degrees in 2002. Although ACF requested grantees to report both the number of teachers holding either degrees in early childhood education or related fields, or CDA or equivalent credentials, and the number of classrooms, ACF did not ask grantees to report specifically if there was a teacher with minimum credentials in each classroom. Furthermore, although ACF monitors about one-third of Head Start grantees each year, the monitoring instrument used did not have a separate question that asked whether each classroom had at least one teacher with at least minimum credentials.

Over 50 Percent of Teachers Nationwide Appear to Have at Least an Associate Degree

According to grantee-reported data, almost 52 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide had at least an associate degree in early childhood education or a related field by the end of program year 2002, thereby meeting the requirement of the 1998 Head Start reauthorization.[5] This was an increase of more than 14 percentage points in teachers with degrees since 1999 (see fig. 1).

[5]Pub.L. No. 105-285, §115.

Figure 1: The Percentage of Teachers with Degrees Has Increased Significantly since 1999



Source: GAO analysis of ACF data. (These data are self-reported by grantees.)

Note: Head Start data on the percent of teachers with degrees were collected somewhat differently in 1998, limiting their comparability with data collected in subsequent years.

[a]The percentage of teachers with degrees in 2002 includes 3.8 percent with graduate degrees, 24.8 percent with bachelor's degrees, and 23 percent with associate degrees. (Does not add to 51.7 percent due to rounding.)

In addition to the 52 percent of teachers with a degree in early childhood education or a related field in 2002, 34 percent of teachers had a CDA credential or its equivalent, and 4 percent more were in training for the CDA credential. An ACF official said that the distribution of the remaining 10 percent of teachers was not known but included

- recently hired teachers without a degree or CDA credential who had not yet begun CDA training and
- teachers with degrees in fields other than early childhood education who had not completed sufficient early childhood education courses to qualify as having a related degree and who did not have a CDA and were not in CDA training.

Grantee-reported data by region showed the progress toward higher teacher degree levels geographically and revealed areas where challenges remain. In 7 of 10 geographic regions, between 55 percent and 76 percent

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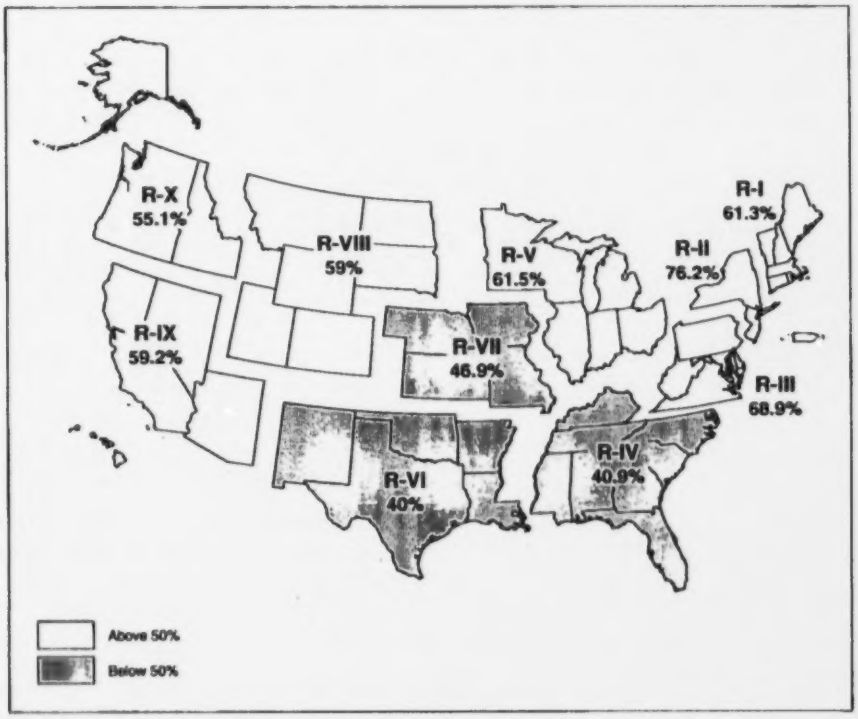
of teachers had a degree in early childhood education or a related field at the end of the 2002 program year, the most recent year for which data were available at the time we conducted our study (see fig. 2).

Figure 2: More Than 50 Percent of Teachers in 7 of 10 Regions Had Degrees as of 2002



Source: GAO analysis of ACF data. (These data are self-reported by grantees.)

Region II, including New York, New Jersey, and Puerto Rico,[6] had the highest level of degree attainment—76 percent. The 3 regions that did not reach 50 percent were in the South and Midwest. The attainment levels for these regions ranged from 40 percent in Region VI (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas) to about 47 percent in Region VII (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska). To some extent, the distribution of teachers with degrees among the regions reflected the educational attainment of

[6]Region II also includes the Virgin Islands, which we excluded from our study.

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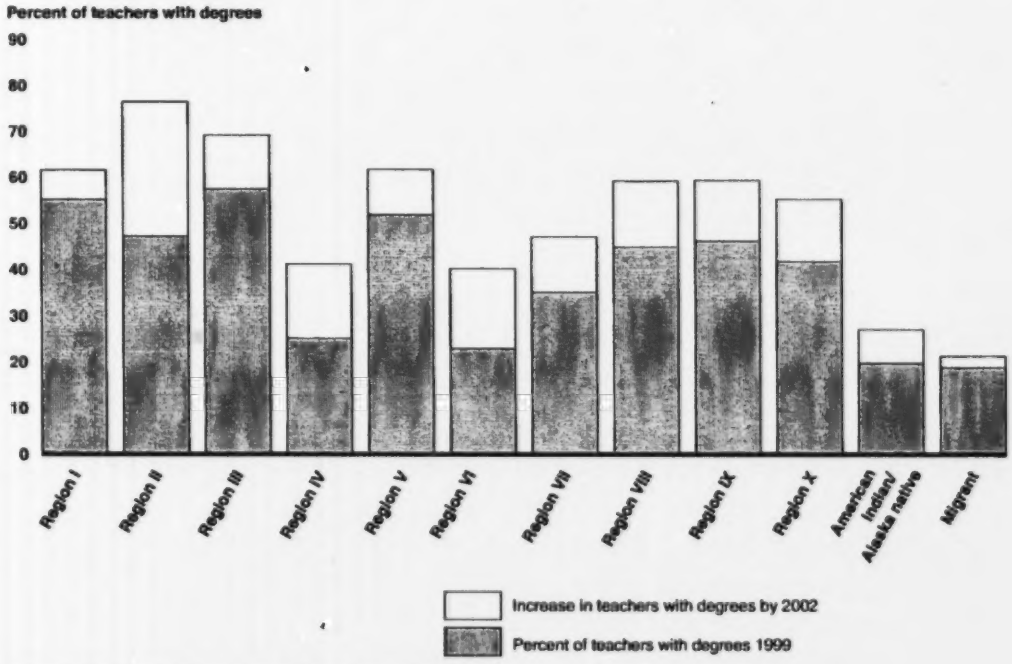
the general population in each region. For example, Department of Education data in 2001 showed a higher percentage of adults with bachelor's degrees in the northeastern states. Furthermore, a National Center for Education Statistics study for school year 2000-2001 showed that over 92 percent of preschool teachers in public schools in the Northeast and Central United States had a minimum of a bachelor's degree, compared with their counterparts in the West and the Southeast, with 84 percent and 79 percent, respectively.[7]

The American Indian-Alaska Native and the Migrant branch programs had substantially lower levels of teachers with degrees as of program year 2002—27 percent and 21 percent, respectively. ACF officials attributed the low levels of teachers with degrees in the American Indian-Alaska Native program to the fact that many of these grantees are in remote locations without access to early childhood education degree programs and the lower likelihood that persons in these areas had completed college education. ACF migrant program officials said that the program's limited increase reflected difficulties in hiring bilingual teachers with degrees in rural areas because the programs are of limited duration and migrant families move frequently; in addition, they cited a need to provide basic English courses for many teachers before they can begin a degree program.

All regions and branches made progress in increasing the numbers of teachers with degrees between 1999 and 2002. Regions experienced an average improvement of about 14 percentage points (see fig. 3).

[7]U.S. Department of Education, National center for Education Statistics. *Prekindergarten in U.S. Public Schools: 2000-2001*, NCES 2003-019, by Timothy Smith, Anne Kleiner, Basmat Parsad, and Elizabeth Farris. Project Officer; Bernard Greene. Washington, D.C.: 2003

Figure 3: All Regions and Branches Increased Percent of Teachers with Degrees from 1999 to 2002



Source: GAO analysis of ACF data. (These data are self-reported by grantees.)

The region showing the greatest increase by far was Region II, with an increase of 29 percentage points, about twice the average of the other regions. Region II officials attributed this increase primarily to a large number of teachers in Puerto Rico who already held college degrees and who then completed the necessary early childhood education courses when funding became available. Four of the 7 regions that had less than 50 percent degreed teachers in program year 1999 had surpassed 50 percent by program year 2002. The remaining 3 regions still had less than 50 percent teachers with degrees by program year 2002, but nevertheless made significant progress in increasing the number of teachers with degrees between program years 1999 and 2002, with increases ranging from 12 to 17 percentage points. In addition, the American Indian-Alaska Native branch program increased by more than 7 percentage points and the Migrant branch program by more than 2 percentage points, although the percent of teachers with degrees for both branches remains far under 50 percent.

It is Not Known Whether Each Classroom in Head Start Centers Has a Teacher with at Least Minimum Credentials

Head Start did not collect data from grantees that allowed determination of whether each classroom in Head Start centers had a teacher with at least minimum credentials. For the PIR, ACF requested grantees to report data on teacher qualifications, including each grantee's total number of teachers and the numbers of teachers holding degrees in early childhood education or a related field, or CDA or equivalent credentials, across all sites administered by each grantee. ACF also requested that grantees report the number of classrooms included in their programs.[8] However, ACF's PIR data collection instrument did not ask grantees if there was a teacher with at least minimum credentials in each classroom, and it is not possible to ascertain this from the collected data. For example, in program year 2002 the PIR reported just over 46,000 teachers with degrees, CDA or equivalent credentials, or in CDA training, and almost 47,000 classrooms, but it did not indicate how many classrooms were not staffed by a teacher with at least minimum credentials. Some classrooms could have been staffed with two teachers meeting statutory requirements, rather than a teacher and an assistant teacher. In turn, other classrooms could have been staffed by teachers without the required qualifications. As a result, the number of classrooms without a teacher with at least minimum credentials may be greater than the difference between the number of classrooms and the number of teachers with degrees, CDA or equivalent credentials, or in CDA training. ACF officials acknowledged that it is likely that some classrooms are not staffed by teachers with at least the required minimum credentials.

ACF monitors each Head Start grantee at least once every 3 years through PRISM reviews, but the monitoring instrument does not have a separate question that asks whether there is a teacher with at least minimum credentials in every classroom. These reviews include analysis of grantee compliance based on the Head Start program performance standards, including the standard for teacher qualifications. However, this performance standard is broad in scope and does not specifically address whether there is a teacher with at least minimum credentials in each classroom. The standard provides that "Head Start programs must comply with section 648A of the Head Start Act and any subsequent amendments regarding the qualifications of classroom teachers."[9] This section of the

[8]The PIR defines the term "classroom" as physical space and "class" as a group of children under the direction of one or more teachers. However, here, and throughout this report, we use the term "classroom" to refer to such a group of children.

[9]This requirement is set forth in 45 C.F.R. §1306.21.

Head Start Act includes the requirements that each classroom in a center-based program have a teacher who has demonstrated certain specified competencies, such as supporting the social and emotional development of children, and that each classroom have a teacher with a minimum of an associate degree in early childhood education, or in a related field with preschool teaching experience, or a CDA or a comparable state credential. As a result, it is not clear whether findings of noncompliance during PRISM reviews are related to issues with teacher competencies or teacher degree and certification qualifications. Furthermore, according to an ACF official, PRISM data are reported at the national level by grantee and are not centrally available by classroom. For example, PRISM review data show that in 2002 about 4 percent of the 559 grantees reviewed had findings of noncompliance regarding teacher qualifications, but the number of classrooms without a teacher with minimum credentials was not reported or requested. Grantees with findings together had about 507 classrooms. About 2 to 3 percent of grantees had such findings in each of the previous 2 years (see table 1).

Table 1: Findings of Noncompliance Related to Teacher Qualifications Over a 3-Year Review Cycle

Year of review	Number of grantees with findings of noncompliance	Number of grantees reviewed	Percent of grantees with findings of noncompliance
2000	18	554	3.2
2001	10	591	1.7
2002	23	559	4.0

Source: GAO analysis of ACF data.

Furthermore, because ACF only evaluates approximately one-third of the grantees each year, there is no way of knowing annually how many grantees are not meeting the teacher qualifications standard and, therefore, may have classrooms without teachers with at least minimum credentials.

Head Start Teacher Salaries Have Increased to Levels Comparable to those of Preschool Teachers, but Some Grantees Reported Difficulties Competing for Teachers with Degrees

Quality improvement funds enabled Head Start to increase teacher salaries to levels comparable to other preschool teachers during the 1999-2001 period. However, some grantees still reported difficulties competing for teachers with degrees. Quality improvement funds have declined steeply in recent years, when Head Start's appropriation grew more slowly than in earlier years. The level of Head Start teacher salaries varied by level of credential and type of grantee administering the program. Teachers in Head Start programs administered by school systems on average had a higher level of education and earned higher salaries than those in programs administered by other types of agencies. Average turnover was lower at grantees administered by school systems and government agencies, than among the 78 percent of Head Start teachers who worked at Head Start programs administered by other types of agencies. While nationally students completed 34,000 individual programs in early childhood education or related fields in the 1999-2000 school year, many grantees reported difficulties competing for degreed graduates in these fields with existing salaries. Data were not available on the portion of students completing early childhood education programs who either work as preschool teachers in Head Start or similar programs or were hired by such programs.

Head Start Programs Have Made Teacher Salaries More Competitive since 1999, but Salaries Varied by Type of Grantee and Level of Education

Increasing Head Start teacher salaries and benefits was a key element in attracting and retaining teachers with degrees, according to ACF regional officials and Head Start grantees. For example:

- The director of a public school grantee in the state of Washington said that adequate teacher salary levels were a great factor in attracting and retaining qualified, degreed teachers.
- The director of a Head Start program in Maryland said that the primary method of effectively reducing turnover has been to raise salaries.

Quality improvement funds enabled Head Start grantees to increase teacher salaries to levels comparable to other preschool teachers during the 1999-2001 period, although salaries remained at about half of what kindergarten teachers earned nationally, as shown in table 2. For example, a Head Start program director in Missouri said that the program had used quality improvement funds to increase staff salaries above the level of childcare workers to a level comparable to the local and national levels for preschool staff, although not to the higher level paid by school districts.

Table 2: Head Start Teachers' Annual Salaries Have Increased to the Level of Other Preschool Teachers' Annual Salaries

In nominal dollars			
Type of teacher[a]	Salary 1998	Salary 2001	Percentage change
Kindergarten	$35,450	$41,100	15.9
Preschool	$19,530	$20,940	7.2
Head Start	$17,956	$20,793	15.8

Source: BLS estimates and GAO analysis of ACF data self-reported by grantees.

[a]BLS included preschool teachers who instruct children (normally up to 5 years of age) in activities designed to promote social, physical, and intellectual growth needed for primary school in preschool, day care center, or other child development facilities. Child care workers are excluded from this category. Special education teachers are excluded from both preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers.

The quality improvement funding peaked at $356 million in fiscal year 2001 and then dropped sharply in the following 2 years when Head Start's appropriations grew more slowly. Quality improvement funding allowed Head Start to make real increases (those that exceed cost of living allowance increases) in teachers' salaries in fiscal years 1998 to 2001. However, the steep decline in quality improvement funding in fiscal years 2002 and 2003, as shown in table 3, greatly reduced Head Start grantees' ability to make further real increases in salaries in those years. As an example, the chief executive officer of a community action agency grantee in Dallas said that since quality improvement funds have been reduced, the program could no longer make progress in closing the salary gap between Head Start and school district teachers.

Table 3: Quality Improvement Funding and Head Start Appropriations, Fiscal Years 1999-2003

Dollars in millions		
Fiscal year	Quality improvement funding	Head Start appropriation
1999	$148	$4,660
2000	$244	$5,267
2001	$356	$6,200
2002	$80	$6,538
2003	$32	$6,668

Source: Appropriations—P.L. 105-277, P.L. 106-113, P.L. 106-554, P.L. 107-116, P.L. 108-7. Quality Improvement Funding—annual ACF Program Instruction Guidance that covered quality improvement funding.

The increase in Head Start teacher's salaries in the 1998-2001 period was widespread, with salaries rising by at least 11 percent in each of the regions and branches and nearly 16 percent nationwide, as shown in table 4. Consumer prices as measured by the Consumer Price Index—All Urban Consumers increased 8.65 percent over this period.

Table 4: Head Start Teacher Salaries Increased Significantly in All Regions and Branches, 1998-2001

In nominal dollars

Region	1998 average teacher salary	2001 average teacher salary	Percent change
I	$17,924	$21,623	20.64
II	$19,335	$22,658	17.19
III	$20,798	$24,161	16.17
IV	$15,793	$18,518	17.25
V	$18,809	$21,984	16.88
VI	$16,702	$18,893	13.12
VII	$15,603	$19,899	27.53*
VIII	$16,791	$19,835	18.13
IX	$21,981	$24,988	13.68
X	$18,376	$21,704	18.11
American Indian-Alaska Native branch	$16,104	$18,284	13.54
Migrant branch	$14,635	$16,313	11.47
Nationwide	$17,956	$20,793	15.80

Source: GAO analysis of ACF data. (These data are self-reported by grantees.)

*According to regional officials, the significantly higher increase in average teacher salaries in Region VII is attributable to efforts to improve professional development, such as emphasizing wage incentive programs for teachers to increase their educational levels. These efforts included partnership agreements that attracted state funding, thus allowing grantees to devote the majority of quality improvement funding to teacher salary increases. They also drew upon other sources of funding, such as an Early Learning Opportunities Act grant, which were used for salary increases.

On average, the 13 percent of Head Start teachers employed at programs administered by school systems earned higher salaries, had a higher level of education, and had a lower turnover rate than other Head Start teachers. For example, teachers with bachelor's degrees in Head Start programs administered by school systems earned, on average, over $31,000 in 2002 while similarly educated teachers in other Head Start programs earned, on average, between about $21,000 and $26,000 as shown in table 5.

Table 5: Head Start Teacher Salaries Were Generally Higher at Programs Administered by Schools in 2002

Agency type	Percent of teachers	Average salary with graduate degree	Average salary with bachelor's degree	Average salary with associate degree	Average salary with CDA or equivalent state certificate	Average annual salary of teachers with a credential[a]
Public/private school system	13	$41,459	$31,368	$24,106	$18,964	$28,177
Public/private nonprofit	39	$34,023	$25,576	$22,335	$19,526	$22,482
Community action agency	36	$27,059	$23,778	$20,918	$18,420	$20,641
Government agency[b]	9	$25,300	$21,831c	$21,327	$19,081	$20,996
Public/private for-profit	1	$22,180	$22,178	$20,182	$18,461	$20,028
Tribal government or consortium	2	$20,893	$22,807	$20,208	$19,193	$19,766
Nationwide total	**100**	**$35,472**	**$25,547**	**$21,797**	**$18,976**	**NA**

Source: GAO analysis of ACF data (These data are self-reported by grantees.)

[a]Credential includes a graduate, bachelor's, or associate degree or a CDA or its equivalent.

[b]Government agencies are those that are administered by governments, such as some cities and municipalities, but are not community action agencies.

[c]Puerto Rico accounts for about 58 percent of the government agency Head Start teachers with bachelor's degrees. Salaries for such teachers in Puerto Rico were about $19,000 per year, causing the overall level of salaries of government agency teachers with bachelor's degrees to be the lowest of any agency type for similarly credentialed teachers. Region II officials noted that the poor job market in Puerto Rico resulted in teachers with bachelor's degrees willing to accept lower pay.

Head Start teachers with a credentials earned just over $28,000 in programs administered by school systems compared with less than $23,000 in programs administered by other agencies.

About one-half of all Head Start teachers employed by programs administered by public and private school systems had a bachelor's or graduate degree in 2002. At Head Start programs administered by most other types of agencies, the percentage of the teachers that had a bachelor's or graduate degree ranged from about 7 percent for tribal governments or consortiums to nearly 39 percent for governmental agencies. One reason that school system programs have more teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher is that a minimum of a bachelor's degree is often a requirement for being hired as a Head Start teacher in these settings. For example:

- The director of a public school Head Start program in Virginia said that the program only hired teachers with at least a bachelor's degree and a state teaching license.
- The Head Start director of an Education Service Center in Texas said that its Head Start grant was received in partnership with 19 school districts and it required that all Head Start teachers have at least a bachelor's degree and be state-certified.
- A representative of a District of Columbia public school system Head Start program said that all of the program teachers had at least a bachelor's degree and those whose degrees were not in early childhood education were working to be certified in that area.

The difference by agency type in the portion of teachers with graduate degrees was especially pronounced, with more than 13 percent of teachers employed by school systems having such degrees compared with about 1 to 3 percent of teachers at Head Start programs administered by other types of agencies (see table 6).

Table 6: Head Start Teacher Degree Levels Were Higher at Programs Administered by Schools in 2002

		Percent of teachers at each agency type by level of education				
Agency type	Percent of all teachers	Graduate degree	Bachelor's degree	Associate degree	CDA or equivalent state certificate	Percent of teachers with a credential[a]
Public/private school system	13	13.5	36.4	19.1	23.7	92.7
Public/private nonprofit	39	3.1	23.0	22.3	34.9	83.3
Community action agency	36	1.7	21.4	25.4	38.4	86.9
Government agency[b]	9	2.8	36.0	22.0	25.8	86.6
Public/private for-profit	1	1.9	21.5	29.5	35.1	88.0
Tribal government or consortium	2	1.1	6.3	19.4	50.6	77.4
Nationwide total	**100**	**3.8**	**24.8**	**23.0**	**34.3**	**85.9**

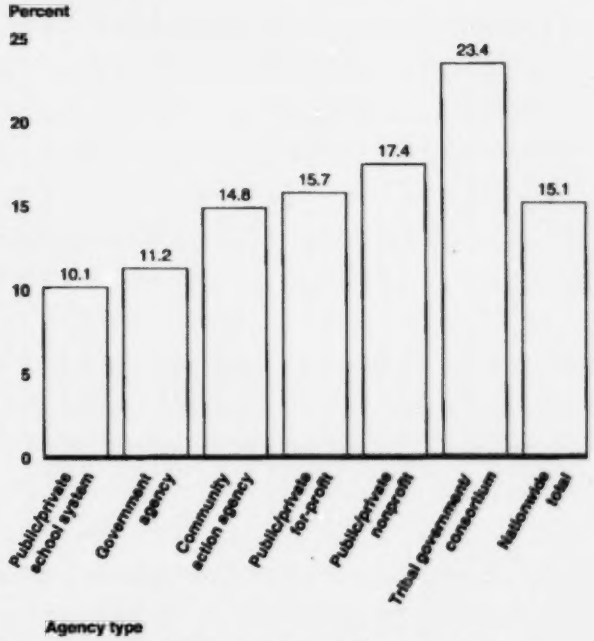
Source: GAO analysis of ACF data. (These data are self-reported by grantees.)

[a]Credential includes a graduate, bachelor's, or associate degree, or a CDA credential or its equivalent.

[b]Government agencies are those that are administered by governments, such as some cities and municipalities, but are not community action agencies.

Average turnover was lower at grantees administered by public and private school systems and government agencies than among the 78 percent of Head Start teachers who worked at Head Start programs administered by other types of agencies. The average turnover rate at Head Start programs administered by school systems was about 10 percent and that of teachers in government agencies was about 11 percent in 2002, somewhat lower than the rate in programs administered by other types of agencies, as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4: Head Start Teacher Turnover Rate Was Lowest at Programs Administered by Schools in 2002



Source: GAO analysis of ACF data. (These data are self-reported by grantees.)

Among all Head Start teachers leaving during the 2002 program year, 30 percent left for higher compensation in the same field, 24 percent left for a change in job field, and the remaining 46 percent left for various other reasons, based on grantee data provided for the PIR.

Some Head Start Grantees Reported Difficulties Competing for Graduates with Degrees in Early Childhood Education Fields

Nationally, students completed about 34,700 individual programs of study in early childhood education and similar fields of study, but some Head Start grantees identified difficulties competing for graduates with degrees in these fields. In both the 1997-1998 and the 1999-2000 school years, students completed about 34,700 programs of study in early childhood education and similar fields of study.[10] However, the number of programs completed in the 1999-2000 school year at the associate and graduate levels increased nearly 7 percent and 2 percent, respectively, from 2 years earlier. The completion of programs at the bachelor level declined slightly during the same period, as shown in table 7.

Table 7: Number of Individual Program Completions, by Level, in Early Childhood Education and Eight Similar Fields for the 1997-98 and 1999-2000 School Years

School year	Associate	Bachelor	Graduate	Other[a]	Total
1997-1998	6,865	13,225	3,484	11,135	34,709
1999-2000	7,332	13,078	3,543	10,755	34,708
Percent change	6.8%	-1.11%	1.69%	-3.41%	0

Source: U.S. Department of Education.

[a]"Other" includes programs that are: less than 1 year, at least 1 but less than 2 years, or at least 2 but less than 4 years in length.

The three states with the most individual programs completed in early childhood education and similar fields had large populations while the reverse was true for the three states with the fewest programs completed. The states with the greatest number of programs completed by students were: California—5,892, Florida—2,706, and Pennsylvania—2,109.

The states with the smallest number of programs completed by students were: Wyoming—17, Alaska—23, and Hawaii—27. These are among the least populous and, in the case of Alaska and Wyoming, among the more rural states.

Data were not available on the number of students completing early childhood education programs who either worked as preschool teachers in Head Start or similar programs or were hired by such programs. However, there is competition for graduates with bachelor's degrees. For

[10]The number of programs completed may be greater than the number of students completing programs because some students may complete more than one program in a given year, according to a Department of Education official.

example, several Head Start grantees administered by nonprofit or community action agencies informed us that the salary they paid for teachers with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education was too low to attract new teachers with early childhood education and related degrees and that even teachers who earn a bachelor's degree while working in Head Start often accepted much higher paying jobs at a public school district upon graduation. The director of a community action agency in Georgia said that hiring degreed teachers was a problem because the agency's salaries were not competitive with the public schools' pre-kindergarten programs, which the director estimated were about 10 percent higher than Head Start teacher salaries. Also, the director of a government agency Head Start program in Texas said that it was more difficult to hire teachers with degrees in rural areas because salaries are lower, and recently graduated teachers like the greater availability of social activities in an urban area.

Several grantees we contacted that were not school systems said that a key cause of turnover was teachers who had earned a college degree leaving to work for a higher salary, and in some cases better benefits, at a school system. Even teachers who had earned an associate degree often went to work at a school system as assistant teachers for higher salaries or better benefits than they would receive as a teacher in a Head Start program not affiliated with a school system. For example:

- An officer of a Texas Head Start program said that teachers hired with an associate or bachelor's degree often left after a year for a higher salary offered by a school district and that this was the main reason for turnover. She said that although the program had increased teachers' salaries to levels well above those of day care centers and above those of most other pre-kindergarten teachers and increased teachers' fringe benefits to be competitive with those of school districts, the program's teacher salaries were still not competitive with those paid to teachers by school districts.

- The director of a Maryland Head Start program said the causes of teacher turnover included moving to the public schools after degree completion for more attractive salary and benefits (including "signing bonuses" offered by the public schools). The director said that the program's primary method of reducing turnover was raising teacher salaries.

Several nonschool district Head Start grantees told us that annual salaries for teachers with bachelor's degrees at Head Start programs administered by school systems were considerably higher than the annual salaries they paid. For example:

- An officer of a community action agency grantee in Dallas said that starting annual pay for Head Start teachers with a bachelor's degree was $26,000, compared with $36,000 paid by the Dallas Independent School District. In addition, while the agency's benefit package was competitive with the school district's, the public school teachers got the summer and Christmas and spring breaks off while the Head Start program operated year round.

- A manager of a nonprofit grantee in New Jersey said that school districts paid new teachers, just out of college, with a bachelor's degree about $5,000 a year more, and certified teachers as much as $15,000 a year more, than the Head Start program could offer. The manager said that it was difficult to retain teachers who acquire a bachelor's degree and certification because those are the requirements for teaching in the public schools. The manager also said that teachers are getting degrees and moving on because Head Start salaries cannot compete with salaries or the 10-month work year offered in the public schools.

Early Childhood Education Programs Were Available in All States and Grantees Have Worked to Improve Access to Them, but Access Is Still a Problem in Some Rural Areas

Our analysis of completion data for early childhood education and similar programs shows that such programs were available in all states and at one in five postsecondary institutions included in the 1999-2000 IPEDS database. Nevertheless, as expected, the more rural, less populous states had few of these programs. Head Start grantees used a number of methods to make early childhood education and similar courses accessible to their teachers, such as offering on-site classes. However, providing opportunities in rural areas sometimes remained a problem. As a result, some Head Start teachers had to travel considerable distances to attend classes.

Programs in Early Childhood Education or Similar Fields of Study Exist in Every State, but Some Rural States Have Few

Early childhood education and similar programs were available to Head Start teachers in all states. Our analysis of data from the Department of Education's IPEDS shows that in the 1999-2000 school year, students completed programs in early childhood education and eight similar fields of study at 1,352 U.S. postsecondary institutions across all states. These programs include graduate, bachelor, and associate degree programs and other programs, such as those less than 1-year. This was an 11 percent increase from 1,215 postsecondary institutions 2 years earlier, as shown in

table 8. Every state had students complete either bachelor's or associate degree programs or both.

Table 8: Number of Postsecondary Institutions with Students Completing Programs in Early Childhood Education and Eight Similar Fields for the 1997-98 and 1999-2000 School Years

Program of study	Postsecondary institutions with students completing program in 1997-98 school year	Postsecondary institutions with students completing program in 1999-2000 school year	Number change	Percentage change
Pre-elementary/early childhood /kindergarten teacher education	428	506	78	18
Individual and family development studies, general	102	107	5	5
Family life and relations studies	28	30	2	7
Child growth, care, and development studies	64	82	18	28
Individual and family development studies, other	12	16	4	33
Child care and guidance workers and managers, general	407	441	34	8
Child care provider/assistant	242	275	33	14
Childcare services manager	121	139	18	15
Child care and guidance workers and managers, other	24	26	2	8
Total[a]	**1,215**	**1,352**	**137**	**11**

Source: U.S. Department of Education.

[a]Total figures differ from a total of the figures in each column because a single school can be counted 9 times if it has students completing programs in all nine of the fields of study.

The 1,352 postsecondary institutions were spread across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico. California, the most populous state, had the largest number of these institutions (128), while there were fewer than 5 of these institutions in 4 of the least populous states (Alaska, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Wyoming), 2 of which (Alaska and Wyoming) are among the most rural states.

Grantees Used a Variety of Approaches to Increase Access to Early Childhood Education Programs

Grantees used a wide variety of approaches to increase access to early childhood education programs for Head Start teachers seeking to earn degrees, and many Head Start staff were enrolled in such programs. Although early childhood education and similar programs were available to Head Start teachers in all states, ACF regional officials and some Head Start grantees said that providing educational opportunities in rural areas

sometimes remained a problem and that some teachers had to travel considerable distances to attend early childhood education courses.

ACF regional office officials and grantees noted that efforts to work with community colleges to provide early childhood education courses during or after the school day at Head Start centers or other easily accessible locations were effective in making these courses available to Head Start teachers. In fact, grantees reported that nearly 45 percent of teachers without degrees were enrolled in such training, ranging from 35 percent in Region II (New York, New Jersey, and Puerto Rico),[11] to 51 percent in Region IX (Arizona, California, Hawaii, and Nevada.)[12] Grantees also provided funding and time off to facilitate teachers' completion of degrees. For example:

- In Region VII (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska), the director of a Missouri community action agency Head Start program reported that the agency developed partnerships with community colleges to provide: (1) on-site courses that were held at the agency's central office as well as at several Head Start Centers and partner sites and (2) field-based CDA courses offering 15 hours of college credit. For college courses, the program paid any tuition costs not covered by financial aid and 50 percent of book fees.

- In Region VI (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), ACF officials said that policies grantees implemented to encourage staff to increase their education level included: (1) paying or reimbursing staff for tuition, books, and testing; (2) allowing staff to attend some classes during the work day; (3) hiring qualified substitutes to allow teachers the time for classes; and (4) assisting staff to apply for Pell Grants and other financial aid.

- In Region III (Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia), the director of a community action agency Head Start program in Delaware said that getting a college degree through Head Start had been the opportunity of a lifetime for many of the program's teachers. The agency has partnership agreements with Delaware State University and Delaware Technical College for college

[11]Region II also includes the Virgin Islands, which we excluded from our study.

[12]Region IX also includes American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Marshall Islands, and Republic of Palau, which we excluded from our study.

classes. The agency pays for tuition, books, mileage, and child care and provides substitute teachers when release time is needed. For example, since most college classes are held at night, teachers are given release time to prepare for class and take care of family needs.

Although programs in early childhood education and similar fields of study were available in all states, such courses were often unavailable or difficult to access in rural areas, according to some ACF regional officials and grantees we contacted. For example, ACF officials said:

- In some rural areas in Region V (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin), which often included smaller grantees, there were few colleges and some lacked early childhood education programs. But, ACF officials said the number of schools offering an early childhood education degree had increased recently with the help of the Head Start quality improvement centers.

- In Region VI (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), more than one-half of Head Start teachers were located in rural areas, making improving teacher qualifications particularly difficult. Few Head Start programs had partnerships with colleges and, for many Head start teachers, classes were difficult to attend due to long distances. For example, in New Mexico some teachers had to travel 2.5 hours to attend class.

Grantees have had some success in addressing the difficulty in accessing courses in early childhood education in rural areas using distance education—education characterized by the separation, in time or place, between instructor and student. For example, according to ACF officials:

- In Region II (New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands), availability of early childhood education programs was no longer a problem except in some rural areas in upstate New York where distance education had helped to provide courses.

- In Region I (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont), there were many institutions of higher education, and availability was generally not a problem even in rural areas. However, officials said that distance learning was used in Maine, the region's most rural state, but only as a last resort because many teachers prefer interaction with others when learning.

Officials noted that distance learning has advantages and disadvantages. Although some grantees said that teachers like the flexibility offered by

courses taken over the Internet, some officials noted disadvantages such as the lack of opportunity to interact with other teachers and the lack of appropriate computer skills. For example:

- In Region VIII (Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming), the director of a school system Head Start program in Montana said that most of the staff preferred distance learning to courses taken at the local college because they could set their own time schedule, take up to 6 months to complete each class, set up a time and place to take tests, and select a tutor. Staff members took each class with at least one other staff person to have someone with whom to discuss ideas. The director said the disadvantages of distance learning courses included a lack of instructors or classmates with whom to interact, the need for students to have up-to-date computers, and a wait for the delivery of class materials.

- In Region IX (Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Marshall Islands, and Republic of Palau), the director of a private, nonprofit Head Start grantee in California said that on-line courses are convenient and allow for scheduling flexibility. She said that a large number of staff reside in other counties and, given work and commuting schedules, have no time to attend college, so Internet coursework addresses these staff members' needs. The director said the agency sponsors and conducts some Internet coursework and gives employees access to the agency's training center computers to take courses on the Internet. However, while Internet instruction is effective for some teachers, the director said that most teachers need and enjoy interaction with other people while learning.

- In Region VII (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska), the director of a community action agency Head Start program in Missouri, which operates in a rural area with little access to colleges courses, said that HeadsUP! (a course provided via satellite to classrooms) had been successful because it had a community college instructor available to facilitate the course. The director said that the advantages of distance education were: (1) it can be scheduled when convenient for the employee, (2) employees can work at their own pace, (3) it provides access to courses not otherwise available to staff, and (4) it can be successful if the employee is highly motivated and independent. She said the disadvantages of distance learning include that: (1) it is easy to fall behind, (2) it is more expensive, and (3) most staff need face-to-face interaction with instructors.

- Another director of a Head Start Program in Missouri (part of Region VII) said that in the 10-county area it served, early childhood education programs for teachers seeking degrees were available only in one city, consequently, teachers in rural areas did not have easy access to programs. The director said that, while one teacher had completed an associate degree using distance learning and two other staff were presently piloting the use of another distance learning program, there had been little overall success with distance learning because: (1) many education programs have a component that requires the student to be on-campus at scheduled times, (2) courses require a certain level of computer skills, and (3) the courses are expensive.

Conclusions

Head Start appears to have met the requirements of the 1998 mandate for teacher qualifications by increasing the number of teachers with at least an associate degree in early childhood education or a related field to 52 percent in 2002. However, the number of classrooms in Head Start centers that did not have at least one teacher with at least minimum credentials was not known because ACF does not require that grantees specifically report such data in their annual PIR.

Head Start grantees and ACF regional officials we contacted said the quality improvement funds used to pay for teacher training and to increase the level of teacher salaries were the key to success in increasing the numbers of teachers with degrees. In addition, the agreements worked out with colleges to provide easily accessible early childhood education courses were seen as a factor in increasing the number of teachers with degrees.

Head Start reauthorization proposals have been introduced that would require increased levels of teachers with associate and bachelor's degrees. Because salaries comprise most of Head Start grantees' budgets, and grantees' teacher salary levels differ based on staff qualifications, it is likely that proposals to enhance teachers' qualifications will require consideration of the implications for the Head Start program.

Recommendation

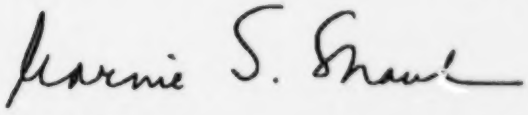
We recommend that the Secretary of HHS require that ACF, at least annually, collect data from Head Start grantees and report to the Secretary on whether each classroom in Head Start centers has at least one teacher with at least the minimum credentials required by law.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Departments of Health and Human Services and Education for their review and comment. In its

written response, included as appendix II of this report, ACF concurred with our recommendation. In addition, ACF provide technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate. Education officials reviewed the draft and said that they support the recommendation and had no comments.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of HHS; Assistant Secretary for Children and Families; Associate Commissioner, Head Start Bureau; appropriate congressional committees; and other interested parties. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on GAO's Web site at http://www.gao.gov. Please call me at (202) 512-7215 if you or your staff have any questions about this report. Key contacts and staff acknowledgments for this report are listed in appendix II.



Marnie S. Shaul
Director, Education, Workforce
and Income Security Issues

Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

This appendix discusses in more detail the scope and methodology for assessing the extent to which: (1) Head Start has met legislative mandates concerning teacher qualifications; (2) Head Start teacher salaries have increased and enabled grantees to attract and retain teachers with degrees; and (3) degree and other programs in early childhood education are available for Head Start teachers and grantees have taken steps to enhance access to them.

In order to determine the percent of Head Start teachers who have at least an associate degree in early childhood education or a related field, we analyzed Program Information Report (PIR) data on center-based Head Start and Early Head Start programs, including the American Indian-Alaska Native and Migrant programs, in the 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia, for program years 1998–2002. These data sources are an annual survey of all grantees regarding various aspects of their programs. We reviewed and performed electronic testing of the data for obvious errors in completeness and accuracy and found some inconsistencies in the way teacher qualifications were reported. We also reviewed a U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Inspector General draft report on the status of efforts to improve the qualifications of Head Start teachers as of program year 2001. This report noted similar problems with the data. However, we determined the PIR data elements we used were sufficiently reliable for this report. Most of our references to portions of Head Start teachers with degrees or CDAs and to teacher salary levels are based on our analyses of these data. Given the timeframes of our review, we could not verify these data with grantees, but have appropriately annotated the data used in our findings. We calculated the percent of teachers with degrees based on the largest number of total teachers reported in the PIR, rather than on the total number of teachers reported by educational level, since a non-exhaustive set of reporting categories was used for this question. In addition, to confirm the reasonableness of these data, we reviewed 1998 and 2000 data relating to teacher qualifications from another source—ACF's Family and Child Experiences Survey. We reviewed these data in order to estimate the percentage of Head Start children instructed by teachers with various levels of education. We also reviewed Head Start laws and regulations addressing requirements for teacher qualifications.

In order to address whether there is at least one teacher in each classroom in Head Start centers with a degree, a CDA credential, or a state certificate at least equivalent to a CDA, we reviewed the PIR survey and related data. We further reviewed Head Start Program Performance Standards and results of Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring (PRISM)

reviews for fiscal years 2000-2002. We also reviewed Head Start laws and regulations addressing requirements for a teacher with minimum credentials in each classroom.

To assess the importance of the competitiveness of teachers' salaries in grantees' ability to attract and retain teachers with degrees and the extent to which degree programs in early childhood education are available for Head Start teachers without degrees, we interviewed officials in 10 regional offices and the American Indian-Alaska Native and Migrant Branches. We also interviewed officials from the Head Start Bureau and contacted officials of 30 grantees. We selected grantees in each region to obtain perspective on both those that had been successful in achieving a high proportion of teachers with degrees and those that were having difficulty doing so. We visited 11 of these grantees in three states—Delaware, Maryland, and Texas—and in the District of Columbia. These grantees were in 2 ACF regions—Region III (Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia) and Region VI (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas).

We also compared salaries of Head Start teachers taken from ACF's PIR data with those of preschool and kindergarten teachers reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) for 1998 and 2001.[1] The results of this comparison were consistent with interview responses on the competitiveness of Head Start teachers' salaries with other preschool teacher salaries. It is important to note that PIR reported by grantees included the average Head Start full-time teacher salaries earned annually, regardless of the number of months worked during the year. Salaries reported by BLS for preschool and kindergarten teachers were estimated average annual wages, based on employer responses to a BLS survey. BLS does not distinguish between full- and part-time workers and assumes that all work 2,080 hours annually (which is a 40 hour work week for 1 year). However, BLS tracks salaries of child care workers in a separate category. On the basis of our review of the methodology used to develop the BLS information, we determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for this report. In addition, we reviewed Head Start Bureau program guidance on quality improvement funds.

[1]BLS included preschool teachers who instruct children (normally up to 5 years of age) in activities designed to promote socials, physical, and intellectual growth needed for primary school in preschool, day care center, or other child development facilities. Child care workers are excluded from this category. Special education teachers are excluded from both preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers.

In addressing the extent to which degree programs in early childhood education are available for Head Start teachers without degrees, we also analyzed Department of Education data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to determine the number of schools with students completing programs in early childhood education and eight similar fields for 1997-98 and 1999-2000 school years. We also identified the number of schools with completing students in each of four categories (graduate, bachelor, associate, and other-such as those less than 1-year) in each state for this time period. In addition, we identified numbers of completed programs by students in these areas of study for these years. ACF defines a degree related to early childhood education as a program of study which includes six or more courses in early childhood education and/or child development. We identified a list of eight fields of study similar to early childhood education that had been used to prepare a 2001 journal article on early childhood teacher preparation at institutions of higher education.[2] The eight fields of study include (1) Individual and Family Development Studies, General; (2) Family Life and Relations Studies; (3) Child Growth, Care and Development Studies; (4) Individual and Family Development Studies, Other; (5) Child Care and Guidance Workers and Managers, General; (6) Child Care Provider/Assistant; (7) Childcare Services Manager; and (8) Child Care and Guidance Workers and Managers, Other. Our review of all fields of study confirmed that this list represents such programs. This list is similar to lists of degree programs related to early childhood education provided by ACF in the past. An elementary education degree or a degree in any one of a number of fields of study with a certification, specialization, endorsement, or state license for pre-school, early childhood, or pre-kindergarten could qualify as a degree related to early childhood education if the program of study includes six or more courses in early childhood education and/or Child Development. However, definitive information on the number of degree programs or students meeting this criterion is not available.

[2]Diane M. Early, Pamela J. Winton, "Preparing the workforce: early childhood teacher preparation at 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education," Early Childhood Research Quarterly 16, pp. 285-306, 2001.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Health and Human Services

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Office of the Assistant Secretary, Suite 600
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20447

SEP 16 2

TO: Marnie S. Shaul
Director, Education, Workforce,
and Income Security Issues

FROM: Wade F. Horn, Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary
for Children and Families

SUBJECT: Comments on the GAO Draft Report, "Head Start: Increased Percentage of Teachers Nationwide Have Required Degrees, but Better Information on Classroom Teachers' Qualifications Needed" (GAO-04-05)

Attached are the Administration for Children and Families' comments on the subject GAO Draft Report.

Should you have questions regarding our comments, please contact Windy Hill, Associate Commissioner of the Head Start Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, at (202) 205-8573.

Attachment

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COMMENTS OF THE ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (ACF) ON THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE'S DRAFT REPORT, "HEAD START: INCREASED PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS NATIONWIDE HAVE REQUIRED DEGREES, BUT BETTER INFORMATION ON CLASSROOM TEACHERS' QUALIFICATIONS NEEDED" (GAO-04-05)

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) appreciates the opportunity to comment on this General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report.

GAO Recommendation

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Health and Human Services require that ACF, at least annually, collect data from Head Start grantees and report to the Secretary on whether each classroom in Head Start centers has at least one teacher with at least the minimum credentials required by law.

ACF Comments

ACF believes this recommendation is appropriate given the statutory requirements for qualified teachers. A process for collecting this information in a uniform and timely manner will need to be designed and articulated. While the Program Information Report (PIR) gives information about the total number of teachers annually, the number with various types of credentials and those in training or college, the current report does not allow ACF to report which classrooms have qualified teachers and which do not.

Therefore, we agree that the data collected should be changed to ask specifically how many classrooms have a qualified teacher, program by program, and we will take the necessary steps to make this change in collecting data in the FY 2004 spring compilation.

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Appendix III: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

Betty Ward-Zukerman, (202) 512-2732, wardzukermanb@gao.gov
Julianne Hartman Cutts, (206) 287-4803, cuttsj@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

The following people also made key contributions to this report: Chuck Novak, Matt Coco, Molly Laster, Grant Mallie, Robert Miller, and Corinna Nicolaou.

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